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ABSTRACT

These guidelines address issues in the application of traditional Alaska Native child-rearing and parenting practices to nurture culturally healthy youth in the contemporary world. Guidelines are organized around each of several roles related to child rearing: Native Elders, as tradition-bearers and essential role models; parents, who are the first teachers of their children; the youth themselves, and their responsibilities for their own growth; communities, tribes, clans, and Native organizations; professional educators, providing a supportive learning environment that reinforces students' cultural well-being; schools, which by engaging fully with communities, can provide consistent expectations for students; child-care providers; youth services and juvenile justice agencies; researchers working with Native communities; and the general public. Special attention is given to educational implications of the integration of traditional child-rearing and parenting practices in schools. Throughout this document, Elders are accorded a central role as the primary source of cultural knowledge. Respected Elders serve as philosophers, professors, and visionaries of a cultural community. Following the guidelines are general recommendations aimed at their implementation and the types of support needed from federal and state agencies, schools and school districts, tribal colleges, communities, and Native organizations. (SV)

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# GUIDELINES FOR NURTURING CULTURALLY HEALTHY YOUTH

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**Adopted by the**
**Assembly of Alaska Native Educators**
**Anchorage, Alaska**
**February 6, 2001**

GUIDELINES FOR NURTURING CULTURALLY HEALTHY YOUTH

The following guidelines address issues of concern in the application of traditional child-rearing and parenting practices in nurturing culturally healthy youth in the contemporary world. The guidelines are

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organized around various roles related to child-rearing, including those of Elders, parents, communities, professional educators, child-care providers, family services agencies, and the youth themselves. Special attention is given to the educational implications for the integration of traditional child-rearing and parenting practices in schools throughout Alaska. The guidance offered in the following pages is intended to encourage the incorporation of traditional knowledge and teaching practices in all aspects of the lives of children and youth, including that which occurs in classroom settings. It is hoped that these guidelines will help to more fully nurture the social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development of Alaska's youth.

Native educators from throughout the state contributed to the development of these guidelines through a series of workshops and meetings associated with the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative. Representatives of the Native educator organizations listed on the cover participated in the meetings and ratified the final document. The purpose of these guidelines is to offer assistance to educational personnel and others who are seeking to incorporate the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools (including those for students and communities) in their work. Using these guidelines will expand the knowledge base and range of insights and expertise available to help communities nurture healthy, confident, responsible and well-rounded young adults.

Throughout this document Elders are accorded a central role as the primary source of cultural knowledge. It should be understood that the identification of "Elders" as culture-bearers is not simply a matter of chronological age, but a function of the respect accorded to individuals in each community who exemplify the values and lifeways of the local culture and who possess the wisdom and willingness to pass their knowledge on to future generations. Respected Elders serve as the philosophers, professors and visionaries of a cultural community. In addition, many aspects of cultural knowledge can be learned from other members of a community who have not yet been recognized as Elders, but seek to practice and teach local lifeways in culturally appropriate ways.

Along with these guidelines are a set of general recommendations aimed at stipulating the kind of initiatives that need to be taken to achieve the goals for which they are intended. State and federal agencies, universities, school districts and Native communities are all encouraged to review their policies, programs and practices and to adopt these guidelines and recommendations wherever appropriate. In so doing, the educational development of students throughout Alaska will be enriched and the future well-being of the communities being served will be enhanced.

Further information on issues related to the implementation of these guidelines, as well as additional copies may be obtained from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, Box 756730, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK 99775 (http://www.ankn.uaf.edu).

**Guidelines for Native Elders**

*Respected Native Elders are the essential role models who can share the knowledge and expertise on traditional child-rearing and parenting that is needed to nurture the cultural well-being of today's youth.*

Native Elders, as the tradition-bearers, can help nurture culturally healthy youth through the following actions:

a. Participate in local and regional Elders councils as a way to help formulate, document and pass on traditional child-rearing and parenting practices for future generations.
b. Establish traditional Elders councils for developing, nurturing and mentoring leadership potential.
c. Help implement and incorporate locally appropriate cultural values in all aspects of life in the community, especially those involving children and youth.
d. Provide guidance and assistance in utilizing traditional ways of knowing, teaching, listening and learning in passing on cultural knowledge to younger generations in the community.
e. Serve as a role model and mentor for young people by practicing and reinforcing traditional values and appropriate behaviors in the everyday life of the community.
f. Share stories and participate in story-telling opportunities in the community as a way to pass on

the cultural values and traditions.

g. Assist new parents in learning the knowledge and skills needed to carry out their role as care-givers and the first teachers of their children.
h. Continue the use of traditional naming practices and help children and parents understand the significance of the names and kinship ties they have acquired.
i. Encourage, support and volunteer to assist in all aspects of the educational programs in the school, including both traditional and contemporary matters.
j. Help young people understand the world around them and how it has changed from the world in which previous generations were raised, including the interconnectedness of the human, natural and spiritual realms.
k. Assist members of the community to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to assume the role of Elder for future generations.

**Guidelines for Parents**

*Parents are the first teachers of their children and provide the foundation on which the social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being of future generations rests.*

Parents, as the primary caregivers, can help nurture culturally healthy youth through the following actions:

a. Provide a loving, healthy and supportive environment for each child to grow and achieve their fullest potential from pre-natal through adulthood.
b. Establish parenting circles in the community that provide an opportunity for young parents to share their joys and frustrations and learn from each others experience.
c. Connect with parents/grandparents in the community who can serve as role models for providing a nurturing family and home environment.
d. Utilize the traditional disciplining roles of uncles, aunts, Elders and other authority figures in the community to help children learn what is right and wrong in a constructive way.
e. Participate as a family and encourage children to become actively involved in cultural activities and learn the traditional values of the community.
f. Set aside time each day and/or week for family-oriented activities, including extended family members whenever possible.
g. Make arrangements to accompany your child through part or all of a school day at least one per quarter to gain an understanding of what they are doing in school.
h. Use traditional naming practices and help each child understand the significance of the names they carry.
i. Volunteer to participate in activities that help make the schooling experiences of each child an extension of their home and community life (e.g., adopt-a-teacher program).
j. Practice the locally identified cultural values and rules of behavior in all family activities and encourage other members of the community to do the same.
k. Assist children in learning and using their heritage language.
l. Assist children to understand their family history and the heritage(s) that shape who they are and form their identity.
m. Make use of locally appropriate rituals and ceremonies to reinforce the critical events in children's lives.
n. Serve as a positive role model and mentor for your children by practicing and reinforcing traditional values and appropriate behaviors.
o. Participate in community-sponsored programs that enhance parenting skills.

**Guidelines for Youth**

*Culturally healthy youth take an active interest in learning their heritage and assume responsibility for*

*their role as contributing members of the family and community in which they live.*

Youth can nurture their own cultural well-being through the following actions:

a. Learn all you can about your family, kinship relations and community history and cultural heritage.
b. Participate in subsistence activities with parents, Elders and other members of the community and learn the stories and lessons associated with those activities.
c. Become actively involved in local activities and organizations that contribute to the quality of life in your community.
d. Show respect to the Elders in your community by assisting them in any way you can.
e. Get involved in regional, state and national issues and organizations that impact your community.
f. Make healthy choices in your lifestyle that contribute to the wholeness and well-being of yourself and those around you.
g. Always be a good role model, show respect, and provide support to others.
h. Participate in apprenticeships with cultural experts in the community and acquire traditional conflict resolution skills.
i. Seek to acquire all the knowledge and skills associated with the "cultural standards for students" (published in the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools).
j. Use critical judgment in the selection of popular media for reading, viewing and listening, and make sure it is aligned with your aspirations as an adult.
k. Associate with friends who can provide healthy role models that will make a positive contribution to your growth and development toward adulthood.

**Guidelines for Communities, Tribes, Clans and Native Organizations**

*Communities must provide a healthy and supportive environment that reinforces the values and behaviors its members wish to instill in their future generations.*

Communities can help nurture culturally healthy youth through the following actions:

a. Recognize that the children of the community are its future, and ensure that every child grows up secure on who they are and confident in their ability to make their own way in the world.
b. Strengthen the parenting roles as reflected in traditional kinship structures by adopting child-rearing as a collective responsibility, and make sure children know their kinship roles and responsibilities.
c. Sponsor regular parent/youth talking circles in the community.
d. Promote healthy community activities and supportive organizations by involving youth as board members and participants in all functions, meetings, workshops, and events related to community well-being.
e. Organize local and regional planning meetings that lead to a consensus on strategies for consistent support of young people from all the sectors of the community that impact their lives (home, school, Elders, church, community organizations, cultural events, media etc.)
f. Be a good role model for and engage youth in all aspects of community life, including involvement in youth-run organizations and councils and participation in Native corporation and tribally-sponsored activities.
g. Foster family and community-oriented activities on a regular basis by suspending bingo, TV and other forms of distraction for one night a week.
h. Recognize and support accomplishments of community members, including youth.
i. Whenever encountering young people and adults in the community, greet them and acknowledge their existence.
j. Foster traditional knowledge, values and beliefs in all aspects of community life and institutional practices.
k. Publish and distribute posters, announcements, buttons, calendars and other daily reminders of culturally appropriate rules of behavior and child-rearing practices as valued by the Elders.

l. Implement tribal courts that incorporate traditional healing, restorative justice and rehabilitation practices to deal with youth who have committed serious infractions of community rules, expectations and protocols.
m. Incorporate the cultural standards for communities and parents into daily life, as outlined in the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools.
n. All youth-oriented programs and services should be administered by Native-controlled organizations at the most local level possible.

**Guidelines for Educators**

*Educators are responsible for providing a supportive learning environment that reinforces the cultural well-being of the students in their care.*

Educators (teachers, administrators, aides, counselors, etc.) can help nurture culturally healthy youth through the following actions::

a. Learn traditional child-rearing and parenting practices to link the knowledge base of the school to that of the community.
b. Recognize that student's developmental needs undergo substantial changes in early adolescence that can effect academic performance, so instructional strategies will need to be adapted accordingly.
c. Adopt curricular and instructional strategies that connect to the cultural and physical world in which the students are situated.
d. Make effective use of local expertise, especially Elders, as co-teachers whenever local cultural knowledge is being addressed in the curriculum.
e. Take steps to recognize and validate all aspects of the knowledge students bring with them and assist them in their on-going quest for personal and cultural affirmation.
f. Develop the observation and listening skills necessary to acquire an in-depth understanding of the knowledge system indigenous to the local community and apply that understanding in teaching practice.
g. Visit the student's homes and learn about the parents aspirations for their children as well as their expectations for you.
h. Carefully review all curriculum resource materials to insure cultural accuracy and appropriateness and assist students in making similar critical judgments themselves.
i. Make every effort to utilize locally relevant curriculum materials with which students can readily identify, including materials prepared by Alaska Native authors.
j. Serve as a role model for students by utilizing constructive forms of discipline over punishment, and providing positive reinforcement over negative feedback.
k. Provide sufficient flexibility in scheduling Elder participation so they are able to fully share what they know with minimal interference by the clock, and provide enough advance notice for them to make the necessary preparations.
l. Align all subject matter with the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools and develop curriculum models that are based on the local cultural and environmental experiences of the students.
m. Recognize the importance of cultural and intellectual property rights in teaching practice and honor such rights in all aspects of the selection and utilization of curriculum resources.
n. Participate in community events and activities to acquire the insights needed to develop appropriate motivation and discipline practices in the school.

**Guidelines for Schools**

*Schools must be fully engaged with the life of the communities they serve so as to provide consistency of expectations in all aspects of students lives.*

Schools may help nurture culturally healthy youth through the following actions:

a. Establish an easily accessible repository of culturally appropriate resource materials and a reliable process for the daily involvement of knowledgeable expertise, including respected Elders, from the community.
b. Include the voices of representatives from the local culture in the curriculum materials used in the school.
c. Provide developmentally appropriate curricula that take into account the cultural variability of the social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs of each child and community, especially during the critical period of identity formation that takes place during the adolescent years.
d. Utilize the natural environment of the community to move educational activities beyond the classroom as a way of fostering place-based education and deepening the learning experiences of students.
e. Support the implementation of an Elders-in-Residence program in each school and classroom and teach respect for Elders at all times..
f. Provide an in-depth cultural orientation program for all new teachers and administrators.
g. Promote the incorporation of the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools in all aspects of the school curriculum, while demonstrating their applicability in providing multiple avenues to meet the State Content Standards.
h. Utilize Elders and Native teachers from the local community to acquire a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the local, regional and statewide context in which the students live, particularly as it relates to the well-being and survival of the local culture.
i. Make use of locally produced resource materials (reports, videos, maps, books, tribal documents, etc.) in all subject areas and work in close collaboration with local agencies to enrich the curriculum beyond the scope of commercially produced texts.

**Guidelines for Child-care Providers**

*Childcare providers should draw upon Elders and other local experts to utilize traditional child-rearing and parenting practices that nurture the values and behaviors appropriate to the respective cultural community.*

Childcare providers can help nurture culturally healthy youth through the following actions:

a. Incorporate parents and other knowledgeable members of the surrounding cultural community to the maximum extent possible in all aspects of childcare and family services.
b. Utilize traditional stories, toys, games, songs, language, foods and related activities whenever possible and appropriate to establish consistency between experiences in childcare and at home.
c. Insure that all childcare workers are knowledgeable about and have first-hand experience in the cultural and family contexts from which the children are drawn (i.e., hire/train local childcare providers).
d. Provide all childcare supervisors and workers with appropriate training and understanding of requirements in areas related to the Indian Child Welfare Act, special needs children, evidence of child abuse, FAS/FAE, health and safety issues, referral services, etc.
e. Encourage sponsoring organizations to implement family-friendly employment practices that encourage maximum parental involvement in the up-bringing of their children.
f. Invite traditional story-tellers to spend time with children while in childcare facilities, or take children to visit Elders in the community.
g. Practice good hygiene at all times and teach the same to the children.

**Guidelines for Youth Services and Juvenile Justice Agencies**

*Youth services and juvenile justice agencies should provide a supportive policy, program and funding environment that encourages local initiative in the application of traditional child-rearing and parenting practices.*

Youth services and juvenile justice agencies can help nurture culturally healthy youth through the following actions:

a. Emphasize cooperative approaches that nurture the intrinsic good in the youth with whom you work, and seek to minimize reliance on threats, punishment and extrinsic forms of motivation to achieve obedient behavior (i.e., focus on reinforcing good behavior over punishing bad).
b. Implement practices that focus on prevention, traditional healing, restitution and rehabilitation as avenue of first resort in dealing with youth who have committed serious infractions of communal rules, expectations and protocols.
c. Work with local communities to adopt correction policies and practices oriented toward education, prevention, remediation, restitution, rehabilitation and healing in culturally appropriate ways
d. Utilize talking/healing/sentencing circles to foster a climate of introspection, support and remediation when seeking to achieve corrective action and rehabilitation.
e. Whenever possible, promote participation and integration of youth into the surrounding society, rather than removal and separation for infractions or anti-social behavior.
f. Work with schools to provide a supportive, prevention-oriented social climate for all students and seek to retain students in a healthy environment as much as possible.
g. Engage youth in multi-media productions in which they are encouraged to portray their aspirations for the world around them.

**Guidelines for Researchers**

*Researchers should work with local communities to help document traditional child-rearing and parenting practices and explore their applicability to the upbringing of today's youth.*

Researchers can help nurture culturally healthy youth through the following actions:

a. Effectively identify and utilize the expertise in participating communities to enhance the quality of data gathering as well as the data itself, and use caution in applying external frames of reference in its analysis and interpretation.
b. Make sure that all research pertaining to child-rearing and parenting include consideration of cultural differences in everything from the sampling and data-gathering procedures to application of the results.
c. Insure controlled access for sensitive cultural information that has not been explicitly authorized for general distribution, as determined by members of the local community and participating families and individuals.
d. Submit research plans and research results for review by a locally knowledgeable group and abide by its recommendations to the maximum extent possible, including ample time for accurate data gathering to take place.
e. Provide full disclosure of funding sources, sponsors, institutional affiliations and reviewers, and supply adequate compensation for all participants.
f. Include explicit recognition of all research contributors in the final report and provide copies to all participating individuals, communities and organizations.
g. Abide by the Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge prepared by Native educators and the research principles established by the Alaska Federation of Natives and other state, national and international organizations representing indigenous peoples (see ANKN web site).

**Guidelines for the General Public**

*All citizens must assume greater responsibility for nurturing the diverse traditions by which each child grows to become a culturally healthy human being.*

Members of the general public can help nurture culturally healthy youth through the following actions:

a. Treat children and youth from all backgrounds with honor, dignity and respect and involve them in the activities of everyday life to the maximum extent possible — this is how they learn to become contributing adults.
b. Encourage and support Native peoples' efforts to apply their own child-rearing and parenting practices in the upbringing of their children.
c. Recognize that all forms of success in school and in life depend first and foremost on developing a strong sense of personal and cultural identity, and that the formative adolescent years are the most critical for defining who we are in relation to others.
d. Celebrate that which we all share in common as members of a national society, as well as all the differences that make each of us unique and serve as the basis for the local and personal identities which enrich our lives and communities.
e. Contribute to and participate respectfully in local cultural events to gain a better understanding of the range of cultural traditions that coexist in Alaska.
f. Provide opportunities for young parents and children to interact regularly with Elders and other experienced parents.
g. Make room in all community events for multiple cultural traditions to be represented.
h. Use popular media to promote positive role models for young people to emulate and to pass on the traditional teachings.
i. Ensure the accuracy and authenticity of all materials that enter the public domain depicting culturally-oriented situations and behaviors relating to particular groups of people.

**General Recommendations**

The following recommendations are offered to support the effective implementation of the guidelines for nurturing culturally healthy youth.

1. The Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools shall be used as a general guide for any educational activity involving nurturing culturally healthy youth.
2. Community and regional entities shall pursue the re-establishment of traditional disciplining, restitution and rehabilitation programs through tribal courts, sentencing circles, Elder's counseling and other forms of culturally appropriate remediation practices.
3. State and federal criminal justice systems and associated youth facilities shall work with local communities to adopt correction policies and practices oriented toward education, prevention, remediation, restitution, rehabilitation and healing in culturally appropriate ways, with incarceration and isolation the punishment of last resort, especially for misdemeanors and non-violent infractions.
4. The Department of Education and Early Development shall expand the focus of the annual Bilingual/Multicultural Education Conference to include an emphasis on traditional child-rearing and parenting (possibly alternating themes from year to year).
5. Each Regional Health Corporation shall sponsor an annual regional gathering around the themes of traditional child-rearing and parenting, including opportunities for men and women to meet independently to discuss their own concerns.
6. School shall sponsor opportunities for students to participate regularly in cultural immersion camps with parents, Elders and teachers sharing subsistence activities during each season of the year.
7. School districts shall provide an annual cultural orientation camp for teachers to acquaint them

with the experiences and the lives from which their students come.

8. All regional Elders conferences shall include traditional child-rearing and parenting as a theme whereby the Elders are able to contribute to the development of contemporary child-rearing practices aimed at nurturing culturally healthy youth.
9. Parenting Circles shall be established in every community to provide an opportunity for young parents to interact regularly with one another and other knowledgeable community members around issues of child-rearing and parenting.
10. As regional Tribal Colleges are established, they shall provide a support structure for the implementation of these guidelines in each of their respective regions.
11. The guidelines outlined above shall be incorporated in university courses and made an integral part of all professional preparation and cultural orientation programs.
12. An annotated bibliography of resource materials that address issues associated with traditional child-rearing and parenting shall be maintained on the Alaska Native Knowledge Network web site (www.ankn.uaf.edu).

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